

196 THE SOUL OF A PEOPLE CH.

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acting for her husband, and she would not have been pleased that her name should appear.

'A good wife,' I said to Saw Ka.

'Like many,' he answered.

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But in her own line she has no objection to publicity. I have said that nearly all women work, and that is so. Married or unmarried, from the age of sixteen or seventeen, almost every woman has some occupation besides her own duties. In the higher classes she will have property of her own to manage; in the lower classes she will have some trade. I cannot find that in Burma there have ever been certain occupations told off for women in which they may work, and others tabooed to them. As there is no caste for the men, so there is none for the women. They have been free to try their hands at anything they thought they could excel in, without any fear of public opinion. But nevertheless, as is inevitable, it has been found that there are certain trades in which women can compete successfully with men, and certain others in which they cannot. And these are not quite the same as in the West. We usually consider sewing to be a feminine occupation. In Burma, there being no elaborately cut and trimmed garments, the amount of sewing done is small, but that is usually done by men. Women often own and use small hand-machines, but the treadles are always used by men only. As I am writing, my Burmese orderly is sitting in the garden sewing his jacket. He is usually sewing when not sent on messages. He seems to sew very well.

462
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Weaving is usually done by women. Under

XV

WOMEN

197

nearly every house there will be a loom, where the wife or daughter weaves for herself or for sale. But many men weave also, and the finest silks are all woven by men. I once asked a woman why they did not weave the best silks, instead of leaving them all to the men.

'Men do them better,' she said, with a laugh. 'I tried once, but I cannot manage that embroidery.'

They also work in the fields—light work, such as weeding and planting. The heavy work, such as ploughing, is done by men. They also work on the roads carrying things, as all Oriental women do. It is curious that women carry always on their heads, men always on their shoulders. I do not know why.

But the great occupation of women is petty trading. I have already said that there are few large merchants among the Burmese. Nearly all the retail trade is small, most of it is very small indeed, and practically the whole of it is in the hands of the women.

Women do not often succeed in any wholesale trade. They have not, I think, a wide enough grasp of affairs for that. Their views are always somewhat limited; they are too penny-wise and pound-foolish for big businesses. The small retail trade, gaining a penny here and a penny there, just suits them, and they have almost made it a close profession.

This trade is almost exclusively done in bazaars. In every town there is a bazaar, from six till ten each morning. When there is no town near, the bazaar will be held on one day at one village and on another at a neighbouring one. It depends on the

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WOMEN

XV

201

● 462 *Her home-life is always the centre of her life*

she could not neglect it for any other: it would seem to her a losing of the greater in the less. But the effect of this custom of nearly every woman having a little business of her own has a great influence on her life. It broadens her views, it teaches her things she could not learn in the narrow circle of home duties; it gives her that tolerance and understanding which so forcibly strikes everyone who knows her. It teaches her to know her own strength and weakness, and how to make the best of each. Above all, by showing her the real life about her, and how much beauty there is everywhere, to those whose eyes are not shut by conventions, it saves her from that dreary, weary pessimism that seeks its relief in fancied idealism, in art, in literature, and in religion, and which is the curse of so many of her sisters in other lands.

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Yet, with all their freedom, Burmese women are very particular in their conduct. Do not imagine that young girls are allowed, or allow themselves, to go about alone except on very frequented roads. I suppose there are certain limits in all countries to the freedom a woman allows herself, that is to say, if she is wise. For she knows that she cannot always trust herself; she knows that she is weak sometimes, and she protects herself accordingly. She is timid, with a delightful timidity that fears, because it half understands; she is brave, with the bravery of a girl who knows that as long as she keeps within certain limits she is safe. Do not suppose that they ever do, or ever can, allow themselves that freedom of action that men have; it is an impossibility. Girls are very carefully looked after

THE ORIGINS OF BURMESE DRAMA

17

have been celebrated year after year, at least since the reintroduction of Buddhism in 1056, and at least since March, 638, when an early king of Pagan, Popa Sawrahan (613-40), drew up the present Burmese era, the dawn of every Burmese new year has been the occasion for mirthful water-throwing.¹ 527
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Buddhism had been introduced into the country through commercial relations with India long before the foundation of the kingdom of Pagan, but from the beginning it was only at second-hand and therefore feeble. The real religion of the Burmese before the re-introduction of Buddhism in 1056 was animistic, and they worshipped various spirits, known as *nats*. There were mediums, mostly women, who danced to please the spirits, and as the spirits were supposed to enter into the bodies of the mediums, sometimes it was believed that the spirits, and not the mediums, were actually dancing. Sometimes the medium herself actually believed that a spirit had taken control of her body, but usually she only pretended that a spirit had entered her, and gave an exhibition of acting. As the medium of each particular *nat* dressed herself in appropriate clothes, the spirit dances were essentially dramatic.² When Buddhism, in one of its purest forms, was introduced under Anawrahta, the great king realized the impossibility of attracting people suddenly to the new faith; so he compromised by recognizing the *nats* as Buddhist spirits and giving them shrines in his Shwezigôn Pagoda as its guardian spirits. When asked the reason, Anawrahta replied: 'Men will not come suddenly to the new faith. Let them come for their old gods, and they will gradually be won over.'³ 177
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So the worship of the *nats* lived on, and with the advance of

¹ Shway-Yoe (Sir George Scott) in *The Burman: His Life and Notions*, and Fielding Hall in *The Soul of a People* give detailed accounts of the feasts and life in the villages. However, as far as I have been able to find out, the Tazaungmôn celebrations have never been described in any English work. [114]

² These dances are still performed on spirit-feast days at Taungbyôn (near Mandalay), a small town given up to spirit worship since the days of Pagan's greatness and perhaps even before.

The belief in, as distinct from the worship of, spirits is not alien to Buddhism.

The chief works on the subject are: Sir R. C. Temple, *The Thirty-Seven Nats*; Grant Brown, 'The Taungbyon Festival' in *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, 1915; the same author's 'The Pre-Buddhist Religion of the Burmese' in *Folk-Lore*, 1921; and G. E. Harvey, *History of Burma*. [113]

³ G. E. Harvey, op. cit., p. 33.

THE ORIGINS OF BURMESE DRAMA

21

However, the Burmese equivalent of the English interlude came into being all the same. It developed out of the equivalent of the English miracle play, but indirectly. The chance of developing the drama was seized by professional actors. To break away from the tradition and the conservatism, persons outside the pale of 'good' society were needed. Spirit dancers were such persons. They worshipped the *nats*¹ and most people looked upon them with fear as being in touch with sinister and unnatural forces. They were outside the religion, and their drunken dances—drunken from wine and ecstasy—were outside the popular conception of moral behaviour. Therefore the new professional actors were drawn from the ranks of the spirit mediums. However, those who took to the new profession were malcontents and failures in their original profession. The increase in the number of the spirit dancers had caused the mediums to form themselves into a fraternity, the entry to which was closely guarded. The economic attractions of spirit dancing tempted people who had no faith in the spirits to become mediums. These factors caused discontent and disunion among the mediums, and within and without the fraternity pseudo-mediums came into being. The advance of education had robbed the *nats* of many worshippers, but most people continued to patronize spirit dancing for mere love of music and dancing. The result was the rise of a class of professional entertainers who danced and sang and played on musical instruments. The new dancers pretended to be mediums and semi-mediums, but their dancing was unconnected with any spirit feast. The rise of this professional dancing was doubtless gradual and must have preceded the *Nibhatkhin*. As early as about the year 1400, two princes and their attendants, when turned out of their palace, earned their living as wandering minstrels and professional dancers, pretending to be spirit worshippers.² Because of the very fact that the new dancers were malcontents and failures in their original

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178
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¹ The objects of the spirit worship are the thirty-seven *nats*, all of whom are more or less of evil character; but there are in addition to these many good *nats* who have little to do with human affairs. [776]

² One prince became King Minkaung (1401-22), the other, his brother, helping him to gain the throne. An attendant became King Mohnyinthadot (1427-40), and the others ministers (G. E. Harvey, op. cit., p. 96). [175]

The new dancers were mostly men. Men mediums were secondary to women mediums, and perhaps that was one of the reasons for the discontent among the mediums, and also the reason why the men took to wandering all over the country as dancers. [462]

536* part, although there was no stage convention preventing women from taking it up as a vocation. The head of the orchestra was also the head of the troupe. He was the most learned and experienced member, and he was responsible for the organization and financial outlay, paying more or less fixed wages to the others, and taking the profits himself. When engaged for a performance, the troupe was paid by public subscription or by some philanthropic person, usually an official, and therefore no charge for admission was made, all being welcome to it. The Burmese actors as a class, unlike their Elizabethan counterparts who could endow a College of God's Gift or buy a coat-of-arms, were poor. But they never starved, for even the poorest villages would welcome and feed them on their wanderings all over the country. The troupe was one large family, and the children of the members accompanied it. In spite of the prejudice against them and their poverty, the actors loved their art, and enjoyed the performances themselves.

[565] 536* There were many conventions connected with the stage, and they can be divided into two classes: those imposed on the actors by themselves, and those imposed by the fear of becoming unpopular with the audience.

795 The actors never forgot that they were originally spirit-dancers, and therefore they had conventions by which they showed their indebtedness to spirit worship. Before the performance offerings of food were made to the thirty-seven *nats*. As a curtain-raiser, there was a performance by a dancer or chorus of dancers. Each wore a red cloth round the head—the sign of a spirit worshipper. Singing invocations to the *nats* and dancing the appropriate dances, they asked for protection by the spirits, while the orchestra played a bar from each of the thirty-seven *nat* tunes. It was supposed that if this convention was broken, disaster would befall the troupe, the performance would prove a failure, and the actors would become mad; but often these conventions had been known to be broken, accidentally or otherwise.

536* The actors were looked upon as irreligious and immoral, and on the slightest excuse, they were in danger of being considered profane. Therefore, as has been stated, they took over the conventions from the *Nibhathkhin*. The Buddha was never impersonated, and an *arahat* or saint only when absolutely necessary, and then by an able and 'serious' actor, who had to keep a fast that day. Not even a mild joke was to be made against the Buddha or an *arahat*, although even monks and the religion itself could be the butt of a clown's wit. But

without ever knowing or caring for the European drama itself, the Burmese may have borrowed their puppets and puppet stage-craft, without ever caring for the shadow drama itself. Such borrowings were possible although the shadow drama itself never reached Burma, for Burmese trading or raiding expeditions were in continuous contact with Siam, and to a lesser extent with Malaya and the East Indies.

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1. (a) The Burmese puppets are worked in delicate detail, and are similar in this and other respects to the Javanese and Siamese figures.

(b) But the Burmese puppets are worked by strings, whereas most other eastern puppets are moved by sticks from below. However, some puppets of India and China are stringed.

2. (a) The Burmese puppet show-men make offerings to the spirits before a performance. Such offerings are also made in Java before the presentation of a shadow play.

(b) But, although the offerings are not made particularly to the thirty-seven *nats*, it may be that the puppet show-men, who consider their calling to be just a branch of the acting profession, are only following the custom of the living actors.

3. (a) The puppet show begins with dances by animals, which are perhaps reminiscent of the Javanese 'fantastic vine' with birds and monkeys on it. A monkey appears among the Burmese puppets.

[825]

(b) But Burmese folk feasts occasioned mimicry of animals, and that practice may have influenced the puppet show. Moreover, the Burmese animal puppets consist, in addition to the monkey, of the tiger, the elephant, and the horse. The *zawgyee* has no counterpart in the Javanese show, and the Burmese show has no bird puppets.

4. (a) Burmese women are not admitted to membership of a puppet troupe, and are not allowed to step on the puppet stage, even when no actual performance is in progress. Is this reminiscent of the Java show, where women are not allowed to see the actual puppets perform?

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(b) But the practice may have been only an attempt by men to reserve the profession for themselves.

5. (a) An appropriate tune to identify a new animal puppet is played in Burma. This is perhaps akin to the Javanese practice of identifying a new figure that has entered by the orchestra playing a special tune.

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(b) But the practice of identifying a new scene (which is almost the same as identifying a new figure) by an appropriate tune has always existed in the performances of living actors, and the puppet show-men may have borrowed it.

593 husband's kinfolk. Post-marital residence is independent and is decided very
 [591] largely on the basis of economic opportunity. The wife's opportunities for social
 intercourse with her family of orientation are, of course, greatest when residence
 is established in her home village; if, however, a couple from different villages
 marry and find it most opportune to settle in the husband's community, the
 [574] chances are that the wife will maintain contact with her family of orientation by
 [582] visits from time to time; such marriages seldom unite persons from villages that
 are very far apart. The very structural features of bilaterality and absence of
 extension militate against inequality and male domination.

562 Burmese culture is frequently remarked for the equality of the sexes, in con-
 593 trast to the neighboring cultures of India and China. This status of the sexes
 seems to be the resultant historically of two patterns of thought. One is an ap-
 parently very old, pre-Buddhist emphasis upon equality, involving equal inheri-
 [428] tance, equal sharing of the property brought to the marriage, equal division of
 [586] property upon divorce, a prominent female role in social and economic life, and
 an absence of transmission of surnames. The other thought pattern dates from
 the superimposition of Buddhism upon older Burmese conceptions: whatever
 [177] ideas of male superiority exist in Burmese life stem from Buddhist notions of
 [775] reincarnation. Although Buddha never expressed himself explicitly on the matter,
 it is taken for granted that only a male can attain Nirvana, since Gautama
 Buddha, who attained that state, was a male.

● 462 In the family household the wife's role includes not only such routine tasks as
 592 the preparation of food and serving of meals, keeping the house orderly and
 clean, and looking after small children; very often it involves control of the fam-
 ily income and the making of all important decisions as to expenditures.

593 Certain observances and taboos, reflective of deference to males, are expected
 784 of the female partner in marriage. She is careful that her lower garments do not
 touch her husband's bed or his personal belongings; she avoids touching her hus-
 band's head. It is believed that the breaking of such taboos may ruin the hus-
 band's success and glory, especially his spiritual attainments. These injunctions
 are followed as a matter of course by Burmese wives and will be broken deliber-
 ately only as an act of spite by a woman who wishes to harm or lower her husband
 for some reason.

593 Despite the various equalitarian aspects of husband-wife relations, there is
 837 a tendency towards a double standard of sexual behavior. A husband who has
 reason to believe that his wife is engaging in extra-marital affairs is very likely
 [586] to display violent anger, beat her, and break up the marriage. The wife of a

BURMESE KINSHIP

443

philandering husband, on the other hand, will usually do no more than display ⁵⁹³ hurt feelings for a brief period; rarely will she separate from her husband, ^{es[837]} specially if they have children.

Siblings. It is the duty of the younger to show deference to the elder. This pertains to the order of serving food, fetching and carrying of things, and even the arrangement of sleeping mats or beds—a younger sibling never should sleep with his feet extended toward an elder sibling. Upon the death of a parent, the eldest sibling of the same sex assumes that parent's socio-economic role in the ^[768] family.

Father-Daughter. Consistent with the age principle, it is a daughter's duty to be obedient and to wait upon her father. Once an unmarried daughter passes the age of puberty, the father is expected to lead a circumspect and moral life more than ever before. Any deviant sexual behavior or drunkenness on his part reflects ^[591] upon the daughter and detracts from her marital chances.

Mother-Son. Although a son owes obedience to his mother, her claim upon him in this regard is tempered by the fact that in Burmese Buddhist thinking, being the mother of a son is itself considered the greatest event of a woman's life and represents the achievement of full existence as a female human being. The relationship is a close and indulgent one. The mother is regarded as more important by the son than his wife; in fact, a son will choose his wife with a great ^[591] deal of regard for his mother's opinions and wishes.

Mother-Daughter. The mother is the female child's early teacher. It is considered most important for the daughter to learn prayers, how to prepare the daily food offering for the household altar, and how to change the flowers on the altar. These things are taught almost from the time the child starts learning language. Other household duties in which the mother instructs her daughter vary considerably with the economic status of the family: in poor families some assistance with tending the animals and winnowing the rice crop is part of the girl's work from about the age of ten. Daughters are expected to show filial respect and deference equally to the mother and father. ⁵⁹³
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⁴⁶² ●

Father-Son. The father occupies the role of disciplinarian in the family. ⁵⁹³ Disciplining of sons may include physical punishment, though such measures to ⁸⁶¹ obtain conformity are not resorted to readily by the Burmese. Prior to adolescence, boys are taught prayers and good habits by their mothers, with the father remaining more or less in the background and interfering only when disciplinary action may be required of him. After a son passes adolescence the father becomes important as his mentor.

WEAVING

With the exception of the stuff for the 59 386



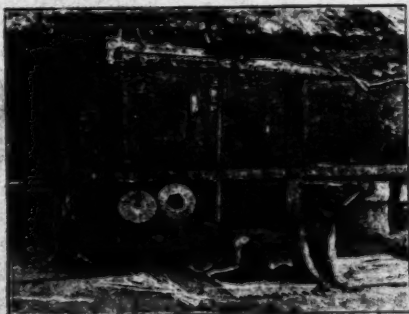
186. BINDING THE THATCH.

recluses' robes, cloth is not dyed in the piece, but in the yarn. 286

Dyes used for cotton are also chiefly imported, but the indigenous dyes continue to be used for silk. The Burmese excel in yellows, oranges, deep reds, and rich deep greens, which they harmonise with beautiful effect. Their clear blues and purples are indifferent. [792]

Except in a few localities, where weaving is a speciality, the men take no share in the industry [342]

beyond constructing the looms. Women spin and dye the yarn and weave the cloth. The lath of the loom (*lekha*) is of graceful outline—often elaborately carved—and is furnished with two ornamented metal pips, with loose metal rings, that jangle at each swing of the beam, and proclaim the industry of the young woman, to whom this business chiefly falls. Hence it comes that the loom is a favourite rendezvous. The same applies to other occupations of the girls, such as rice-cleaning, when the suitor will take a turn at the heavy part of the work and lounge while the sifting goes on. Common patterns of cloth are tartans, for which two or three shuttle-spools are required. The plainest cloth woven is at least shot with a colour different to that of the warp. The intricacy of a pattern is denoted by the number of spools. Scroll patterns (*cheik*) in silk are called *hau-tayd* (hundred-spool). The warp is a cubit wide and about twenty cubits long, which makes a man's loin-cloth (*paaf*). The piece is doubled and its edges sewn together along one side; the turn of the cloth serves as a bag or wallet, according as the piece is draped; it has no lining. The *paaf* is hitched round the loins and girt long or short, according to fancy, without the help of a belt; but elastic belts are now coming in. The slack is worn in a bunch in front (*hahlunga*) or is thrown over the shoulder. 286



187. PLAITING FLOOR-MATS (see p. 98).

286
291

[342]

CLOTHING

No kind of wool is indigenous

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439]



THE LAVING OUT THE SHIRT.

or is spun or woven in Burma. Caesar Frederick in 1569 mentions woollen cloth among the goods brought to Burma, *vid* Arakan. Web vests for boys and men, of European manufacture, are becoming general. The use of shoes of the European shape is bringing in the use of socks and stockings. The addition of a European shirt under the Burman jacket makes up the incongruous kit affected by the modern office clerks. With the increased use of body-linen have come the Indian washermen. The coloured stuffs are washed by the Burman women. The native dyes wash well, especially the silk dyes. An alkali-earth (*sappho*) is found in Burma, but soap is of modern introduction, and is now sold in every bazar. Needles used to be brought to Burma from China, as well as scissors, though the latter are also fashioned in Burma; at present both are imported from Europe. Burmans work the needle from them, like other Asiatics. The work is pinned to a cushion at the head of a post planted on the work-box. The use of the thimble was unknown until tailors came over from India, but is now general. The bulk of the tailoring is in the hands of immigrants from China; but their prejudice against the sewing-machine is helping to transfer the business to the Burman women. Nearly every well-to-do family in the towns has its sewing-machine.

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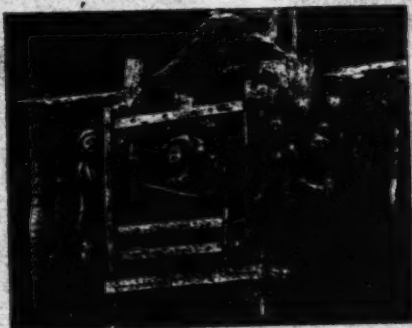
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At sunrise the women start with their water-pots for the day's supply, and again before they cook the evening meal, which finishes the day's work. On the morning errand they do the most of their washing. In the evening they carry a spare cloth to change for the one they bathe in, which they wash and coil into a pad to put between the head and the water-



131. BURMESE CARVING OF WEAVING-LOOM.

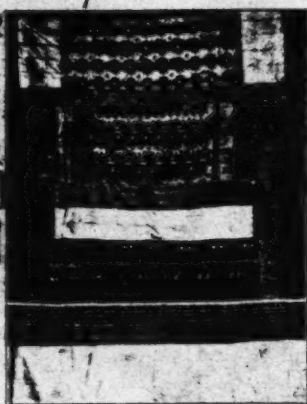
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BURMA



122. BURMESE SILK CLOTH PATTERNS.

pot. The Burmans bathe in the morning or evening, and not in the heat of the day. Men and women bathe in their clothes and at the same places.

Burmans will travel far to a source of good drinking water. It is stored in porous earthen pots with covers, in which it settles and cools over-night. Rain-water is saved for other uses and stored in large glazed jars (*sin-th*). A coconut ladle is used for dipping the water out, to avoid disturbing the sediment. In the rainy season the river water bears a heavy silt and has to stand for hours. Spring water is scarce owing to the distance of the Burman settlements from the hills. The ordinary sources are rivers, wells, and tanks.

In the moist region the subsoil water comes up to, or near the surface during the rains, and in the drought sinks twenty or thirty feet. In the dry zone it is sometimes necessary to dig one hundred feet for water. Wells are generally fenced and protected from return and



123. THE SPRING.

STATUS OF WOMEN

73



187. DOMESTIC FLOWER STAND
INVAUNG-YE-O, PP. 8, 83.

zone of commerce is neutral; women embark in wholesale trade, besides transacting the bulk of the retail trade. In certain localities women do the lighter part of the out-door work, and in the poorer districts of the dry zone they share in the heavy labour. Women are accorded precedence among men according to the standing they have acquired by marriage or by their independent efforts. The *Kyangums*—the woman who has founded and who supports a school—enjoys a deference on all sides proportioned to the munificence of her gift. Women mix freely among men but are never jostled by them. At great gatherings men and women group apart. The Burman women are smart at repartee, and hold their own in the perpetual banter that goes on between the sexes.

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one, no disability of a practical kind exists for her. But it is the aspiration of every woman to transmigrate as a man in the next phase of existence (*Jesva*, p. 43). As the state of a man is thought a more desirable one, so it is inferred that her life in the previous incarnation has brought the woman's state upon her. How deep and tender is the poetry which the idea of transmigration weaves into the life of the Buddhist may be judged from the example at the close of Chapter XXIII. of *The Soul of a People*. Orphans are adopted by relatives, and in default of such, never fail to find foster-parents. The division of labour between the sexes is the common one of out-door and in-door. Wherever circumstances permit, women are relieved of hardship; the sheltered places in boats and carts belong to the women and children. The great middle



188. WAYSIDE WATER STAND IN THE CITY
PP. 81, 82.

562
[275]

[531
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[462]

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[271]

[521]